

Next 2 Met | Interreg Europe

Increasing attractiveness of Next2Met regions with soft digitalisation
measures

Action Plan

Region of Päijät-Häme

Finland

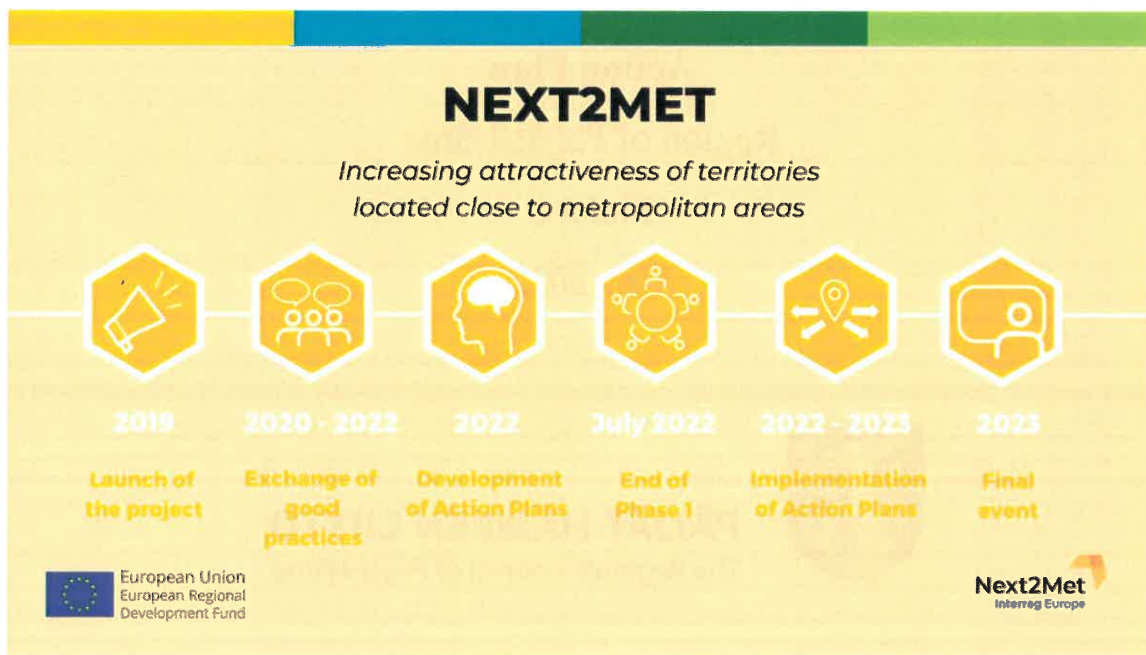
May 2022



PÄIJÄT-HÄMEEN LIITTO
The Regional Council of Päijät-Häme

interreurope.eu/next2met | [@Next2Met_EU](https://twitter.com/Next2Met_EU)

Project and Policy Context



Next2Met is an innovative interregional exchange project, co-financed by the Interreg Europe programme, which aims at increasing attractiveness - for knowledge, opportunities, and capital - of territories located close to metropolitan areas.

interregeurope.eu/next2met | @Next2Met_EU

These areas are confronted with a lack of tools and critical mass of research, development, and innovation, and therefore struggle with keeping experienced small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as highly qualified people in the region.

In this context, Next2Met worked for the improvement of policy instruments through interregional learning processes in **6 different regions**, focusing on **soft digitalisation measures** applied to a variety of sectors such as health care, transport, tourism, and public administration, among others.

These actions, nurtured by the good practices exchange that took place between partners throughout the project's lifetime, are linked to a broader European policy context, which is constantly developing in response to major challenges and crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic.

By improving services and products with the use of technology and digitalisation measures, Next2Met contributes to the **digital and green transition**, helping the territories in reaching the Green Deal objectives. Furthermore, the project also addresses the following key goals identified in the European Commission's Communication "[Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade](#)", which sets out digital ambitions for the next decade:

- a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals;
- secure and sustainable digital infrastructures;
- digital transformation of businesses;
- digitalisation of public services.

Digitalisation processes and investments have been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis which brought about a complete shift of perspective and made clear the necessity to foster digital development in numerous sectors. New trends and the use of digital tools in people's daily lives as well as in businesses' operations have emerged in this period and served as useful material and sources of inspiration for the project. As a reaction to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic on society and the way we live and work, the project has oriented its focus towards certain dimensions, already enclosed in its initial approach of "soft digitalisation", such as 360° quality of life, multilocality and hybrid work, citizen participation and inclusion. The connection with citizens and their involvement in territorial development through bottom-up and participative initiatives has been further considered by the Next2Met project because of their relevance in the present context and at European policy level.

In fact, a human-centred perspective is at the core of the European Commission's vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030. In this regard, on 26 January 2022, the Commission proposed an inter-institutional solemn [declaration](#) on digital rights and principles for the digital decade, which includes a specific point on citizens' participation in the democratic process at all levels and underlines the importance of citizens' control over their own data.

Indeed, the Next2Met project has been able to adapt to this new context and ultimately benefit from it, by fostering the exchange of good practices among its partner regions and beyond and further implementing digitalisation measures that improve people's lives and increase regional attraction.

interregurope.eu/next2met | [@Next2Met_EU](https://twitter.com/Next2Met_EU)

I. General Information

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Project | Next2Met |
| Partner organisation | Regional Council of Päijät-Häme |
| Country | Finland |
| NUTS2 region | Southern Finland |

Contact details

| | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| Name and surname | Harri Kuusela |
| Email address | harri.kuusela@paijat-hame.fi |
| Phone number | +358 44 077 3630 |

II. Policy Context

| | |
|---|---|
| The Action Plan aims to impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Investment for Growth and Jobs programme➤ European Territorial Cooperation programme➤ <u>Other regional development policy instrument/s</u> |
| Name of the policy instrument addressed | Regional Strategy of Päijät-Häme, 2022-2025 |

interreurope.eu/next2met | @Next2Met_EU



PÄIJÄT-HÄMEEN LIITTO
The Regional Council of Päijät-Häme



The Business Agency
of Lower Austria



**Diputació
Barcelona**



Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly



Podlaskie IT



WITENO



CPMR
CRPM

III. Details of the Action Envisaged

Multilocality, Hybrid Work, and Competence Mobility as Factors of Regional Attraction

1. Background

During the Next2Met project the world has changed radically. The project had been running for half a year, when the Covid-19 pandemic spread in Winter-Spring 2020. This had – and still has – many consequences; the basic theme and setup of the project remains, but the next-to-metropolitan approach has gained new focus sectors. One of these is the movement of competent workforce in the ‘New Normal’ era, a situation marked with massively increased remote and hybrid work. In addition to the effects on everyday routines, people and societies have also started to think of long-term changes when it comes to the places of living, working, studying, and free time. On the other side of the coin, regions are seeing growing hybrid work as notable factor in the dynamics of their economic and social development.



According to the territorial analyses and discussions with the Next2Met partners, even before the pandemic and the fluctuations it has caused, the partner regions suffered from a declining population, demographic distortion, lack of highly skilled work force and brain drain of young and professional people heading for bigger cities. It seems as evident that these demographic trends will continue, meaning a still-existing need to find solutions for the peripheral or otherwise less-favoured regions to pull and keep people, competencies, and businesses. All these elements apply to our region, Päijät-Häme, and thus a systematic approach to utilise the opportunities offered by multilocality, hybrid work, and competence mobility, offers a clear topic for action. We are bundling the three elements of the topic, because they are closely interdependent and cannot be treated as separate actions.

Definitions:

Multilocality: The practice of carrying out active everyday life in multiple places. This generally implies *access to*, but not necessarily *ownership of*, more than one residence.

“Generally speaking, multi-locality is characterised by the fact that individuals, social groups, or economic subjects pursue their basic and/or their economic interests concurrently or alternately at several places.”

([Source 1](#) ; [source 2](#))

Hybrid Work: alternating remote work (at home, second residence, in public premises etc.) and work at the employer's premises. Applies also on studying.

Competence Mobility: how students and skilled workers move their place of permanent and temporary residence because of various pull and keep factors (e.g. educational opportunities, work opportunities, personal and family reasons, economic reasons, environmental considerations, or other reasons).

Lessons learned

During the Next2Met project exchanges – project meetings, Policy Learning Events, bilateral exchanges, discussion with partners and stakeholders – our region has gained

interreurope.eu/next2met | [@Next2Met_EU](https://twitter.com/Next2Met_EU)

inspiration and input from various partners and case examples. Below is a description of the most central ones and their implications.

The most prominent Good Practice to initiate our interest in the Action Plane theme has been our Irish partner EMRA's case of their digital hubs and coworking spaces:

- <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/4294/multi-fund-development-of-digital-hubs-co-working-spaces-in-rural-areas/>

This Good Practice, its background, and connection to other measures was discussed during our Partner Meeting in May 20, 2021, and Policy Learning Event in May 26, 2021, hosted by EMRA (online event). Especially the Counties of Offaly and Longford in our partner region Eastern and Midlands, have worked on both policy and operational contexts and have been able to provide us with concrete examples and mirroring points for our own plans.

We were pleased to find [an Irish national strategy](#) to support regional and local actions. This is something that we have taken as a goal in the regional level – to have supportive strategic policy structure and corresponding documents to back-up and lay ground for regional policy and operational actions.

In addition, all other partners have shared their insight and regional views on remote work, multilocality, and competence mobility, mostly in commenting the EMRA practices and experiences, but also in terms of their own cases, for example our partner Witenö in connection to a PLP invitational event *“Making Innovation Visible: The Role of Spaces for Innovation”* on Friday 4 February 2022, where [a video](#) was presented to illustrate the effect of remote work opportunities for next-to-metropolitan regions. Other related practises and case examples have been discussed in our project meetings and PLE's in Finland (January 2020), Austria (May 2020), Spain (December 2020), and Poland (December 2021), as well as in the “Extra-curricular” activities, such as the Next2Met webinar on citizen participation in March 2021 and Next2Met workshop on regional attraction in the EU Regions week in October 2021, and in many online events, such as PLP webinars and online discussions, where our project has actively taken part.

To gain detailed input for our Action Plan, we arranged visits in Spring 2022, including visiting Eastern and Midlands region to witness their practices first-hand. These study visits were of crucial importance to gain insight and finalise the action plans, and to fine-tune the monitoring mechanisms of the results, including relevant indicators. During the Covid travel

interregeurope.eu/next2met | @Next2Met_EU

restrictions we were able to meet and discuss only virtually, which works to a certain extent, but does provide as wide an exchange experience as on-site visits do.



Next2Met Study Visit to Co:worx coworking hub in Irish Midlands in May 2022

Based on these exchanges and lessons learned, as an action, we plan to build a comprehensive structural approach to multilocality, hybrid work, and competence mobility in our region. We have learned that in addition to practical actions (such as establishing coworking hubs), a supportive strategic and policy framework is needed, to ensure the impact of the actions and durability of the results achieved.

As described above, there are two primary paths to adapt the lessons learned to our region. The first is to incorporate the thematic approach in our key plans, such as the new policy instrument regional strategy (for a detail description of the policy instrument see page 6), which is our main long- and mid-term policy document. This first path naturally includes the overall will of the policy makers and actors to support the Action Plan theme. As will be witnessed below, this has been achieved. The second path is to utilise the on-site study visits to gain detailed and deep insight into the partner's experiences which are related to our Action Plan theme. This will strengthen the "ingredients" of our plan, and most probably fine-tune the detailed actions envisaged and their monitoring.

Policy Instrument Change

The original Policy Instrument of Next2Met for Päijät-Häme was the *ERDF funding programme Sustainable growth and jobs 2014 - 2020, Priority Axis 2: Producing and using the latest information and knowledge*. However, as this instrument has no more funds remaining nor any relevant policy effect, the new Regional Strategy for 2022-2025 is adopted as our new Policy Instrument. The Regional Strategy is the key regional document to direct the regional development actions, including Smart Specialisation spearheads, and is accepted by the Regional Assembly and implemented by the local actors under supervision of the Regional Council. The first regional round of the new ERDF funding programme for the period 2021-2027 was launched in March 2022, and according to our legal framework and regulations, the criteria of the ERDF funding is obliged to follow and support closely the themes and topics addressed in the Regional Strategy.

Operational connection to and Regional Strategy and Regional S4 strategy

The Key themes in the new Regional Strategy for the Päijät-Häme region, valid until 2025, are:

- General regional attractiveness
- Pull and re-pull factors (for people and business)
- Regional magnetism and renewability
- Quality of every-day life, especially for hybrid and remote workers
- Overall brand of the region, based on facts & figures
- Competitiveness

As stressed before, the Action Plan is closely based on the Policy Change achieved in terms of the Regional Strategy development, especially considering the factors that aim to attract (or keep) professional hybrid workers in the region. Therefore, the Action Plan implementation and monitoring proceed parallel with the strategy implementation process.

The S3 priorities, renewed alongside the new regional strategy, are:

- Sport

- Food & Beverages
- Manufacturing

With **sustainability** as a cross-cutting theme for all the 3 spearheads, thus making the S3 priorities close to S4 approach. As for the Action Plan, the connection to the S3/S4 priorities is not so direct as it is with the regional strategy, but there is common ground: for example, the need for skilled work force is underlined in the development of the priority sectors. This connection will be further discussed both in the regional multilocality and hybrid work road map and the regional strategy implementation process (which, as mentioned, are aligned).

On December 3, 2021, the Regional Assembly of Päijät-Häme region accepted a new regional strategy that is valid until 2025. The first Key Element of the strategy is making the region attractive not only for newcomers, but for current inhabitants, too:

“We will make Päijät-Häme a pioneer in multilocal remote working and recognise new opportunities for tourism and housing.”

In another section of the strategy, dealing with *“Attractive and renewing Päijät-Häme”*, in point 4 out of 5, the region is labelled as a *“a place to work remotely, close to nature”*.

[Unofficial translations]

The strategy is available in Finnish at https://paijat-hame.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/171121Maakuntastrategia_2022-2025.pdf

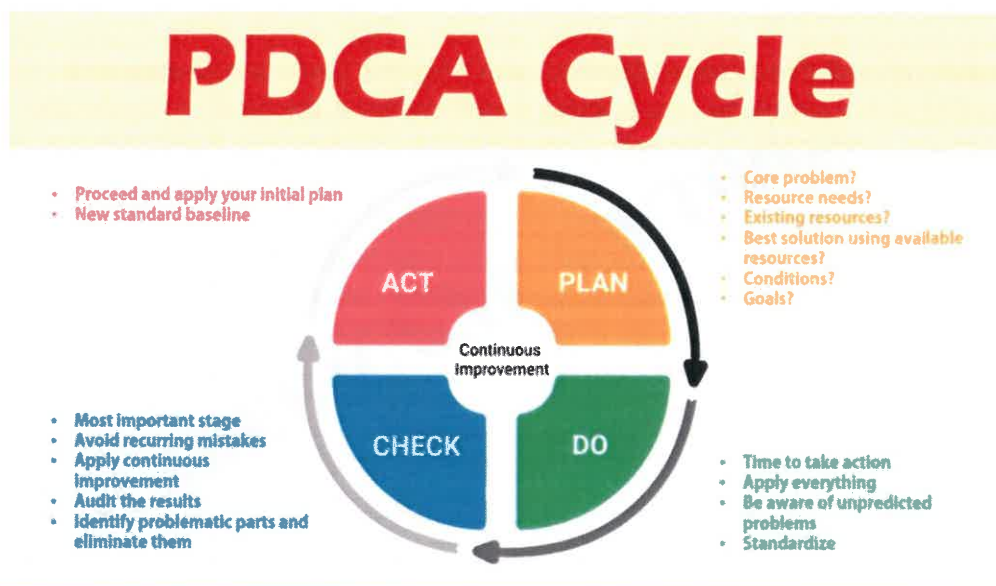
Before this very notable strategic approach was adopted, there was an extensive preparation phase where the new strategy was prepared in the form of stakeholder consultations, workshops, commenting rounds and public hearings. Next2Met was very closely involved in this process, as it coincided schedule-wise with our Action Plan development; the input from the project was available throughout the strategy process. There were also other themes on the table where Next2Met influenced – including digitalisation, spatial planning, and transport solutions - but the theme of multilocality and remote work (including competence mobility as a built-in element) was substantially influenced by the lessons learned from Next2Met.

Especially during Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 2021 Next2Met was actively involved in the preparation activities of the strategy. The strategy preparation was the responsibility of our Regional Development Team under which Next2Met is also placed, as regional development is seen closely connected to international activities and exchanges. During

this process several Next2Met partners were bilaterally consulted in online meetings, for example ecoplus (Austria) on 20 April and 3 May 2021 on cluster management and monitoring indicators in the context of Smart Specialisation. In May 20, 2021, there was a regional online workshop on strategy preparation with a large set of local stakeholders, and Next2Met provided input gathered from international project partners. Following the webinar, the subject was addressed in our regular team meetings (Regional Development Team), and Next2Met took an active role in connecting lessons learned in the project with strategy and S3/S4 development. The team leader also brought these topics directly to the strategy stakeholder and process owner meetings, which influenced the strategy content development.

2. Action

Considering that clear regional strategic emphasis has been laid to the theme of multilocality and hybrid work, and thus a policy change can be stated to be achieved, the ensuing actions should focus on strategy implementation and measurable steps. We will use the PDCA cycle model:



interreurope.eu/next2met | @Next2Met_EU

The concrete planned actions are as follows.

First, a **Regional Multilocality and Hybrid Work Road Map** is drafted to encompass all relevant factors to enhance the goals envisioned in the regional strategy. This road map serves as the basis of concrete actions, including:

- Regional analysis what multilocality and hybrid work mean for individuals, families, students, professionals, retired people, companies, municipalities, and public authorities
- Connecting multilocality and hybrid work to regional S3/S4 priorities and finding mutually supportive elements
- Steps to synchronise municipalities' efforts to conceptualise multilocality and remote work as pull/keep factors (regional perspective instead of potentially competitive and excluding municipality-based actions)
- Definition of roles and responsibilities of regional actors
- Description of process management, including coordination measures and regular stakeholder meetings organised by the Regional Council

Concrete actions to be taken concentrate around three themes:

1. Coworking hubs and community building
2. Supporting public services
3. Marketing / branding actions.

Coworking hubs and community building is a very practical and measurable action, which concentrates on mapping potential locations and premises for coworking hubs, assessing their economic and functional viability, and providing policy and financial support for accepted plans to establish them. The objective of this action is not only the physical premises, but also the social aspect, putting emphasis on the community building and citizen engagement in and around the coworking concepts.

Supporting public services in connection to multilocality and hybrid work include measures to provide both people and companies with various mechanisms to be able to adopt remote work practices in different situational and life-related situations. These can be e.g., working from home office, using summer cottage as a workplace (in one municipality there are more summer cottages than permanent apartments!), utilising coworking spaces or office hotels,

interreurope.eu/next2met | [@Next2Met_EU](https://twitter.com/Next2Met_EU)

using a secondary home for working purposes, or the like. What's more, the supporting services include the social aspect mentioned above; working outside office environment is different, and many people crave for community involvement, be it workplace-related or with local professional and other communities. Public services can provide preconditions for these needs.

Marketing / branding actions play a significant role in attracting people and companies to a region – or keeping them there. These measures are usually taken care of by regional business, travel, and tourism agencies, but there are still grey and empty sectors remaining in the campaigns: multilocal hybrid workers do not always fall into the (traditional) categories of target groups. For example, in between occasional visitors and permanent residents, there are groups interested in mixed arrangements, combining different periods of stays and models of working. And although our common arguments – typically such as standard and cost of living, clean nature, security, recreation opportunities - remain, there has emerged and will emerge new elements of regional attraction. Therefore, additional actions and coordination measures are needed to reach out for the potential target groups the “New Normal” has created.

The main policy instrument for promoting and supporting these themes is the Regional Strategy and its implementation, hand-in-hand with ERDF 2021-27 funding, managed by the Regional Council of Päijät-Häme. Criteria for the funding follows closely the goals listed in the Regional Strategy.

3. Players involved

As mentioned above, the key player implementing this Action Plan is the Regional Council, being the process owner of both Regional Strategy (Policy Instrument) and the managing authority of regional ERDF funding (Funding Instrument). The Regional Council can adjust funding priorities according to regional strategy, policy developments (operational plans derived from the Regional Strategy), and existing S3/S4 priorities. In addition, several regional players have been and continue to be involved in the process with specific roles:

- LADEC (regional business development agency): ensuring business point of view in multilocal and hybrid work employee attraction, mapping companies' needs and preferences, communication measures to promote the region for the specific target groups

- Lahti Region / Lahti Travel, regional travel and tourism agency: expanding marketing efforts to the “new” target groups described above
- Municipalities: aligning and joint efforts to attract people & companies with coordinating role of the regional council
- Universities: how to integrate students to region already during studies; alumni activities to attract them back

4. Timeframe

The generic time frame to operationalise the Action Plan can be divided in three phases:

1. Short-term: relevant analyses, stakeholder engagement, action implementation (ERDF funding)
2. Mid-term: further actions to map best directions, PDCA cycle model “Act” (ERDF and other funding)
3. Long-term: permanent operational concepts (own funding)

Planned timetable:



- ERDF regional funding call, first round – Spring 2022 (tbc) - to fund concrete actions which support Regional Strategy
- Launch of new ERDF projects – Autumn 2022 (tbc)
- Regional data gathering and analysis for white paper – Autumn 2022
- Regional multilocality and hybrid work draft road map – Autumn 2022
- Regional workshops with actors and stakeholders – regular basis
- Regional multilocality and hybrid work road map, adopted – Early 2023
- ERDF regional funding call, second round – Spring 2023 (tbc)
- Launch of new ERDF projects, second round – Autumn 2023 (tbc)
- Analysis of ERDF funding impact in terms of allocated resources for the Action Plan topics – Spring 2023 onwards

NOTE: ERDF funding is not guaranteed to projects addressing this Next2Met Action Plan activities and goals, but the ERDF funding criteria follow the content of the Regional Strategy, and project proposals that support the implementation of the Regional Strategy have a priority in the evaluation process.

5. Monitoring and indicators

As stated above, we will adopt a PDCA cycle, which includes a monitoring phase (“Check”). The exact monitoring procedure and schedules will be described in detail in the Regional Multilocality and Hybrid Work Road Map. Indicators to measure progress consist of several items, most of which are available through the regional statistical services maintained by the Regional Council:

- Number of people moving in and out of the region (including relevant background info: gender, age, education, employment, income level)
- Non-permanent resident trend (when applicable)
- Number of co-working hubs and number of people using them
- Trend of multilocal residentials; summer cottage dwellers, part-time remote workers etc.
- Number of regular commuters to other regions, and the trend of commuting days per month
- Number, personnel, and turnover of companies coming and leaving region
- Brain drain of students graduating from local universities and vocational schools (also return rate where applicable)
- Regional ERDF funding allocated to projects addressing / related to the topics of this Action Plan and Regional Strategy

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Date | 15.6.2022 |
| Signature |  Niina Pautola-Mol, Regional Mayor |
| Stamp of the organisation |  |

interreurope.eu/next2met | @Next2Met_EU

